



THE  
*Jimmy Carter*  
PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Grades 2-5



# Program Overview



## Bills and Laws

- What are they and why do we have them?
- How can we solve our problems?

## Branches of Government

- What are they and what role does each of them play in creating our laws?

## Making Sense of Civics

- How do you see it?
- Bill to Law Exercise
- What would you do differently?



**Left:** Tax Bill Political Cartoon (National Archives Identifier: [6011694](#))

# Bills and Laws

## What are laws and why do we have them?

How would you describe this photograph to someone who can't see it?

What could result from this?

Do you think this is okay?

If not, what can you do about it?



Learn more about [Kids at Work: Congress and Child Labor](#) from the National Archives

**Right:** Children Working in a Textile Mill in Georgia  
1/19/1909 (National Archives Identifier: [523148](#))





# Bills and Laws

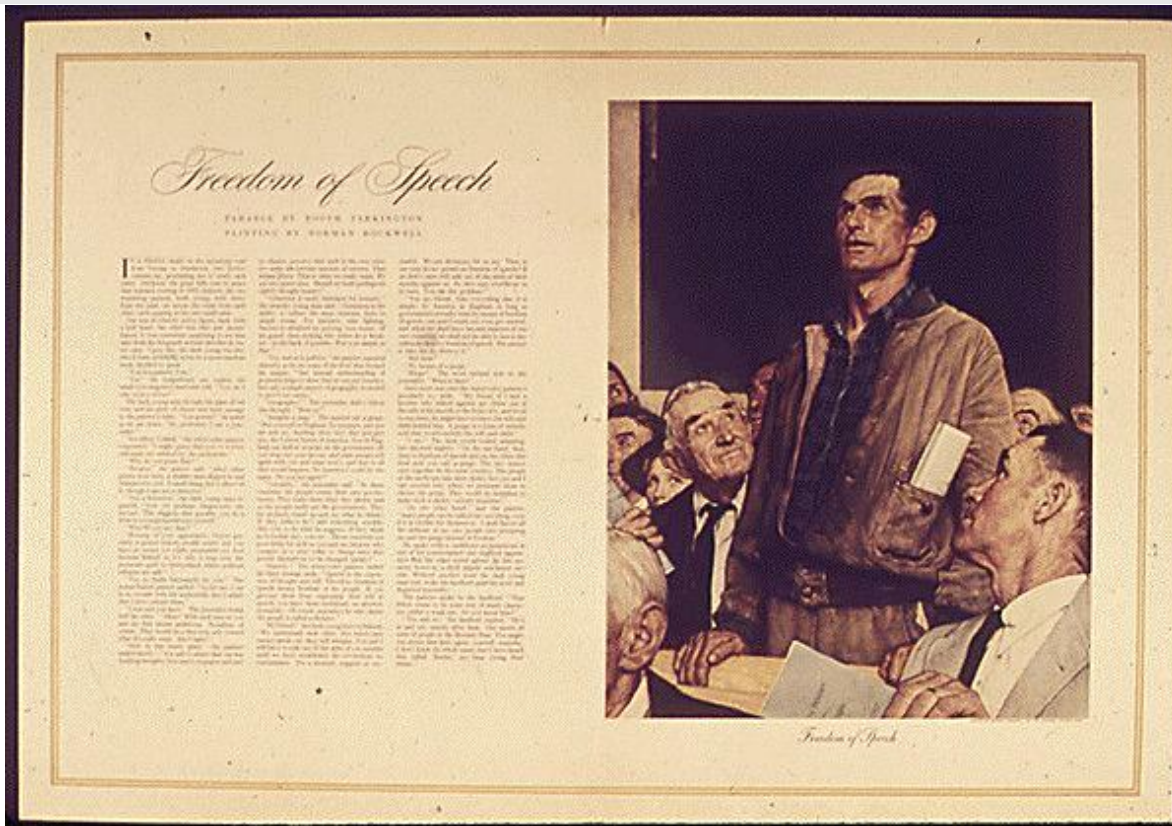
## Communicating Our Ideas to Shape Our Nation

What can we learn from the [Bill of Rights](#) about communicating our ideas with our government?

Why do you think the [Bill of Rights](#) was so important in the founding of our nation?

Read more from the National Archives:  
[The Bill of Rights: How Did it Happen?](#)

**Right:** Freedom of Speech, painting by Norman Rockwell, 1941-1945 (National Archives Identifier: [515599](#))



# Branches of Government: Legislative

## The Legislative Branch

- Consists of the House of Representatives, and the Senate; together referred to as Congress
- Housed in the U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.
- Draft, debate and vote on Bills to be sent to the Executive Branch for approval

Engage your students in the Constitutional debates of America's founding fathers with [Inside the First Congress: Debating the Bill of Rights](#)

**Right:** United States Capitol Building, 1939 National Archives Identifier: [6219856](#)





# Branches of Government: Legislative

## How Many Members of Congress are There?

- One U.S. Representative for about every 720,000 Americans; total of 435 members of the House of Representatives
- The Constitution gives each state two Senators, no matter how many people live there; total of 100 Senators in the Senate
- The U.S. population is counted every 10 years in the [Census](#) to help determine the number of representatives in Congress

**Left:** An Enumerator collects a family's information for the 1940 U.S. Census (National Archives Identifier: [6200775](#))



# Bills and Laws



## From Idea to Bill

1. Can begin in either House or Senate
2. Proposed Bill studied by committee or small group of representatives
3. Once approved by committee, shared with rest of House or Senate for debate, changes and vote; steps repeated in other chamber
4. After both chambers pass Bill and work out differences, final Bill sent to President

**Left: Political Cartoon, "Vote on Military Bonus Bill" 3/24/1922**  
(National Archives Identifier: [6011718](#))

# Bills and Laws

## What does Congress have to think about when creating a bill?

How can we solve a problem without violating the Constitution?

Who will this bill benefit? Who will it hurt?

Will it have enough votes to pass and will the President sign it?



Visit [DocsTeach](#) to find out what happened next to the bill to grant Harriet Tubman a military pension for serving as the first American woman to lead troops in battle!

**Left:** Bill Granting a Pension to Harriet Tubman Davis, 1/19/1899 (National Archives Identifier: [306578](#))

55TH CONGRESS,  
3d Session. **H. R. 4982.**

[Report No. 1774.]

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

DECEMBER 14, 1897.

Mr. PAYNE introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Invalid Pensions and ordered to be printed.

JANUARY 19, 1899.

Reported with an amendment, committed to the Committee of the Whole House, and ordered to be printed.

[Amend the title.]

### A BILL

Granting a pension to Harriet Tubman Davis, late a nurse in the United States Army.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*  
3 That the Secretary of the Interior be, and he is hereby,  
4 authorized and directed to place ~~upon~~ <sup>on</sup> the pension roll of the  
5 ~~United States~~ <sup>Harriet Tubman Davis</sup> the name of Harriet Tubman Davis, late a  
6 nurse in the United States Army, and pay her a pension at  
7 the rate of twenty-five dollars per month in lieu of all other  
8 pensions.

Amend the title so as to read: "A bill granting an increase of pension to Harriet Tubman Davis."



# Branches of Government: Executive

## The Executive Branch, Led by the President:

Approves or Vetoes Bills

Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Military

Makes Treaties with Foreign Nations

Nominates Federal Judges

Learn more about the powers of the Executive  
Branch by reviewing [Article II of the U.S.  
Constitution](#)

**Right:** Anyone Home? Berryman Political Cartoon Collection, 2/24/1920  
(National Archives Identifier: [6011590](#))



# Bills and Laws



## Is a Presidential Veto the End of a Bill?

- Congress can override a President's veto if **2/3 or 67%** of both the House and Senate vote to do so (**House:** 290 of 435 votes, **Senate:** 67 of 100 votes)
- Congress can change the bill to satisfy the President, pass it again in both houses, and send it back to the President

**Left:** President Jimmy Carter signing ANILCA, 12/2/1980 (National Archives Identifier: [166691808](#))

# Branches of Government: Judicial

## Checking Up on Laws: The Judicial Branch

- New bills will not have a good chance of becoming laws if they appear to be Unconstitutional
- Americans can challenge laws they think take away their rights
- The Supreme Court has the final decision on laws

**Right:** President Barack Obama Greets Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (National Archives Identifier: [118817965](#))





# Making Sense of Civics



## How Do You See It?

1. Why do you think smaller committees review and approve bills before the rest of Congress does?
2. Only about 5% of all bills introduced in Congress become laws. Is this good or bad? Why or why not?



**Left:** Women Members of United States 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, ca. 1965 (National Archives Identifier: [541939](#))

# Making Sense of Civics

## Bill to Law Exercise: Safe Ice Cream Act

Adults are worried that children are eating too much high-sugar, high-fat ice cream. Many have written letters or called their representatives in Congress to propose a bill to fix this problem. But there are a lot of people to consider. Thinking about how ice cream is made and where we purchase it, choose which groups below could be affected by this bill:



- A. Truck Drivers
- B. Dairy Farmers
- C. Food Stores
- D. Ice Cream Consumers
- E. All of the above



**Right:** Uncle Sam's Ice Cream Cone Labels (National Archives Identifier: [5716617](#))

# Making Sense of Civics

## Bill to Law Exercise: Safe Ice Cream Act

Some Members of Congress think high-sugar, high-fat ice cream is not good for students and think the government should regulate consumption. Other members agree but don't think Congress should tell students what or how much to eat. Choose two options below you think represent a compromise between these different points of view:

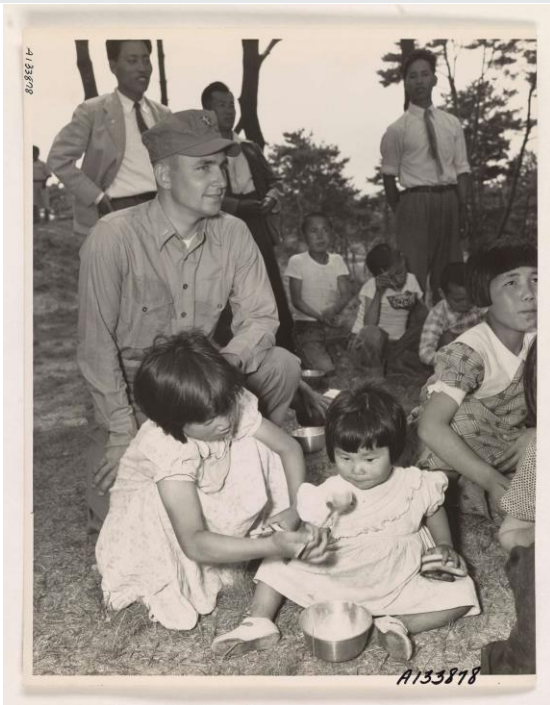
- A. No ice cream sold in schools
- B. You must be 16 to buy ice cream
- C. Only fruit in ice cream, no candy
- D. Only low-fat, reduced sugar ice cream sold in schools
- E. No new regulation of ice cream



Political Cartoon, Sugar means Ships...Every Spoonful -Every Sip- Means less for a Fighter, ca. 1918 (National Archives Identifier: [512563](#))



# Making Sense of Civics



Two Korean girls taste ice cream for the first time, 7/23/1950 (National Archives Identifier: [74247779](#))

## Bill to Law Exercise: Safe Ice Cream Act

We're now at the point where our Committee is voting on whether to introduce the Safe Ice Cream Act to the rest of Congress, continue discussion and debate, or do nothing at all. Choose from one of the following three options:

- A. Choice #1 from previous slide
- B. Choice #2 from previous slide
- C. Neither, this bill may be viewed as Unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and needs to ensure the rights of American students are not trampled



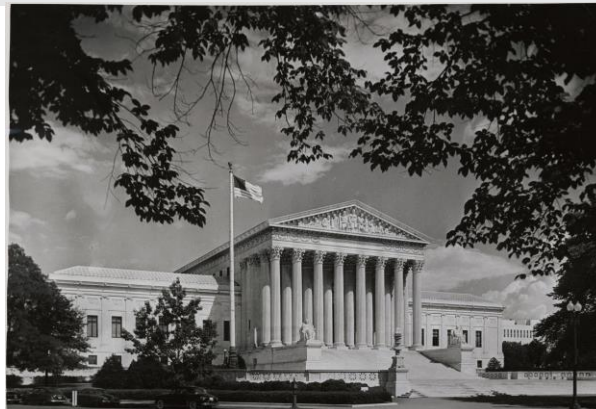
# Conclusion

**The Legislative Branch works with the other branches of government to solve our nation's problems**

Is there anything about the passage of laws in our nation that should be changed? Why do you think that?



**Clockwise from top:** Supreme Court Building (National Archives Identifier: [594954](#)) The United States Capitol, 1/15/1977 (National Archives Identifier: [6384310](#)) The White House, 1/15/1977 (National Archives Identifier: [6384319](#))



# Follow-up Assignment



1. Review all of the photographs, documents and artifacts/objects from the presentation and choose one that you would like to look at more closely.
2. Visit the [National Archives website](#) and scroll down to **Worksheets for Novice or Younger Students, or Those Learning English.**
3. Select the right worksheet for your selection and answer as many questions on it as you can (it's okay if you can't find all of the answers).
4. Share your answers with your teacher and classmates as directed.

